

VOLUNTEER VOICE



SEPTEMBER 2008

"The Voice of the Earth Team"

Connecticut Volunteer Honored for Contributions

Howard Peck, a retired quality engineer in Connecticut, was recently recognized at the Windham County Soil and Water Conservation District annual meeting for his many contributions and valuable assistance.

Peck was one of 100 volunteers who walked, waded or canoed to

The partnership is a cooperative effort of regional and state organizations to determine what's needed to protect agricultural and natural areas, water quantity and quality, and the region's bio-diversity.

Peck and his fellow 'stream walkers' covered more than 200 miles along segments of the Quinebaug,

excessive algae growth, barriers to fish passage, streambank erosion, a lack of naturally occurring plants and channels.

Both the Windham County Soil and Water Conservation District in Brooklyn and the Connecticut Association of Conservation Districts presented Peck with

Virtual Volunteering Gains



Students Learn While Volunteering

When Steve Melton heard about the NRCS Earth Day outdoor classroom for middle school students in Champaign County Illinois, he found a creative way to use the Earth Team to make his high school class a part of the action.

The theme for the event was 'Habitat, Humans, and Harmony.' Melton saw this as a chance for his biology class to help out and to take biodiversity beyond the textbook.

A farm in the Embarras River watershed was chosen because of the amount and extent of wildlife habitat on the site, as well as conservation practices that help alleviate flooding in the watershed. His students all live in the watershed, and flooding has impacted all their lives at one time or another. The site demonstrates solutions to very local resource issues.

Although the lessons at the outdoor classroom were developed for younger students, Melton contacted the Habitat, Humans, and Harmony coordinators at the NRCS Illinois State Office to find a way for his students to be involved. NRCS staff invited the class to sign up with the Earth Team and help younger students learn about farming, conservation, and the environment.

The Villa Grove High School students helped set up for the event toured the wetlands, received training, put up signs, arranged equipment, and set up tables and chairs.

During each day of the two-day event, other students served as Earth Team volunteers as well assisting a station presenter deliver lessons on conservation to more than 550 middle school students.

The volunteers also assisted in

lunchtime supervision and cleanup. In all, these young Earth Team volunteers provided 297 hours of service for the event.

Villa Grove High School volunteers plan to return for next year's Earth Day program, and both Melton and NRCS staff are exploring ways the class can help out the rest of the year.

These volunteers are learning about the benefits of volunteerism and careers in conservation. But more importantly, the Earth Team in Illinois is making it possible for high school students to get involved and make Earth Day extra special for younger kids.

For more information, contact Jill Creamean, NRCS communications specialist, at (217) 353-6609 or jill.creamean@il.usda.gov



Earth Team volunteers from Villa Grove High School take a break from Earth Day activities.

Virginia Scouts Plant Trees

Camp Shenandoah, the Stonewall Jackson Area Council Camp for the Boy Scouts of America, is the site of the largest conservation program in Virginia's history.

Nearly 140 Boy Scouts and Scout leaders planted 1,300 hardwood trees. The BSA enrolled a farm, which serves as an outdoor classroom for Scouts, into the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program.

As part of the tree-planting effort, the Scouts became Earth Team volunteers, contributing more than 900 volunteer hours to complete the job.

Earth Team Volunteer Celebrates 80th

Earth Team Volunteer Alyce Simms celebrated her 80th birthday with friends and coworkers at the Natural Resources conservation service (NRCS) Area Office in Red Bluff on March 7. The informal get together allowed Area Office staff to share in the celebration of a personal milestone, and it also provided an excellent opportunity for NRCSers to show their appreciation for the valuable service that Simms provides.

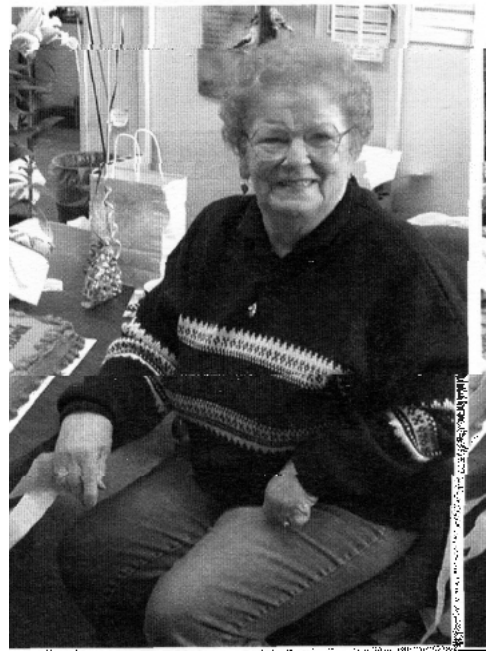
"I enjoy working as an Earth Team Volunteer because I feel that I'm making a contribution to the important work of the NRCS," says Simms. "I know that the office is short handed, and I have knowledge and abilities that they can use."

Born March 9, 1922, Simms retired from SRI International (formerly Stanford Research Institute) in November 1986, after 21 years as a Word Processing Supervisor. She joined the Soil Conservation

Service (now NRCS) as a volunteer in January 1991. Simms first worked with Jack Bramhal creating a database for forestry projects. She then worked with Lisa Hokholt creating databases for the NRCS Earth Team Volunteer Program. Simms currently works with Barbara Ammon reconciling PCMS computer transaction.

"Alyce has been coming in since January of 1991," says Ammon. "She has shared many of her life stories with us and has been a real asset to the Red Bluff Office. She is a dedicated and hardworking Earth Team Volunteer."

Simms has a history of volunteerism. During World War II, she served in the U.S. Women's Navy (USWN) from October 1942 until honorably discharged in November 1945. During her wartime service, Simms was stationed at Arlington, Virginia with BUPERS Casualty Department.



Alyce Simms

Finding the Right Personality

Chuck Centers, Earth Team volunteer from Paintsville, Kentucky, is a great example of the volunteers working throughout the Nation in the Earth Team program. Chuck became a volunteer after working with the District Conservationist, Jerry L. Adams, in a community project four years ago. Because of his love for the outdoors, kids, and improving his community, Chuck is an enthusiastic volunteer. Over the years, he has increased his own awareness of natural resources and the USDA-NRCS's efforts to preserve them. Chuck assists NRCS staff with surveys, water sampling, and a variety of projects at the District's sponsored 46-acre outdoor classroom. Jerry says, "There are more Chuck's out there willing and able to assist us, we just have to find them."

Volunteers Among Science Bowl "Winners"

Ninety Earth Team volunteers lent their time to the eighth annual Regional Science Bowl conducted February 2 in Lincoln, Nebraska.

The volunteers included some NRCS state office employees, retirees and staff members from the Northern Plains Regional Office. However, most of the volunteers were recruited from the local community.

Nationally the U.S. Department of Energy sponsors the Science Bowl. The Nebraska regional event is the only one sponsored by NRCS, which is involved in a lesser role in other Science

Bowl competitions throughout the country.

The Nebraska regional featured 28, five-person high school teams. During the competition, students answered questions about astronomy biology, physics, chemistry, mathematics, earth science and computer science.

Omaha Creighton Preparatory High School advanced from the regional competition to the National Science Bowl for the second straight year. However, the 90 Earth Team Volunteers also are winners!

Keeping it in the Family

By Julie Tingwald, Boone County SWCS, Boone Iowa

The day at a typical USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service office starts. The lights are turned on, computers are warming up, coffee is being made, and staff is settling down at their desks or making preparations to go to the field.

You go over your list of things to do. You pause, wondering how on Earth are you going to get everything accomplished. If teamwork is what it takes, what if your team isn't large enough to accomplish the everything.

You begin with the smaller and more urgent tasks. The phone begins to ring. It's someone wanting technical assistance. The technician is already in the field—he came in early to get a head start on his long list of projects. Another phone call. Another person would be nice, but it's not in the budget.

The door causes a suction of wind as it allows a farmer and her daughter to enter. The technician hasn't returned and the District Conservationist (D.C.) is on the phone and the secretary is

Iowa State University? Majoring in Landscape architecture? Does she have an interest in gaining surveying experience and maybe help in the office?

She does! She does! We have a live one! Quick get out the "Easy to fill out Earth Team Volunteer application!"

Heather McDorman, a name that's like sweet music to the ears of an over-worked field office. Heather brings a shy, sweet quality along with enthusiasm and dedication to her volunteer job. She works diligently and silently constructing watershed maps and doing CRP status reviews. You sometimes don't realize that she is in the office.

With such dedication Heather would make a great employee and when WAE hours and district funds came available she was hired! End of story? No.

It just so happened, while working on a Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) project, extra help was needed on the "artistic" part of the project. With Heather so busy assisting

"How about my mom? She's a retired teacher."

You might remember the 'mom' was the farmer that had come in for some technical advice. And that is how Elizabeth McDorman became a volunteer. It was great having a mother-daughter team working in the office. Having them work together showed that dedication was running in their family. Elizabeth put her creativity to good use with fellow district employees, creating fantastic, eye-catching booth for the county fair!

Don't Rule Out Volunteer Sources

In your search for volunteer, it pays to look beyond the 'standard' sources. Anyone is a potential volunteer.

When the Central Florida RC&D Homebuyer's Club needed someone to